



ICON WITH SAINTS
TEMPERA / PANEL 17 x 19"
DETAIL ON FRONT: ST. MICHAEL



ROCHESTER, MI 48309-4401



BETWEEN MATTER AND SPIRIT: RUSSIAN ICON PAINTING

MEADOW BROOK ART GALLERY
OAKLAND UNIVERSITY



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JANUARY 10 - FEBRUARY 9, 2003

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OAKLAND UNIVERSITY



ICON OF THE NATIVITY
TEMPERA / PANEL / SILVER 12 x 10"
c. 1888



HODIGITRIA MOTHER OF GOD
OIL / PANEL / METAL 10 x 9"
c. 1884

The 'Hodigitria' (translated as 'showing the way') iconographical type is among the most popular and ancient in Russia. Traced to a Byzantine prototype, the Hodigitria shows the Mother with the Christ child on her arm, gesturing toward him with her right hand. In Russia the Hodigitria type produced several local variants, including the Smolensk, Tikhvin, and Kazan.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

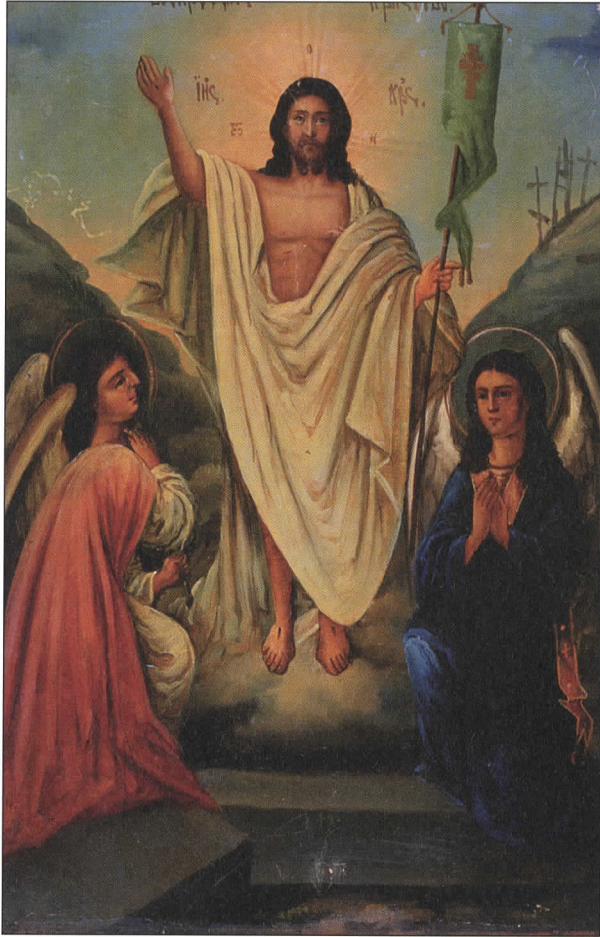
The icons and samovars in this exhibition are drawn from the Eduard and Juana Kotlyarov collection of Russian decorative and religious art. Dr. and Mrs. Kotlyarov have generously lent part of their extensive collection to share with the Oakland University community in southeast Michigan.

I would like to personally thank the Kotlyarovs for their gracious hospitality on my numerous visits to their home in Bloomfield Hills.

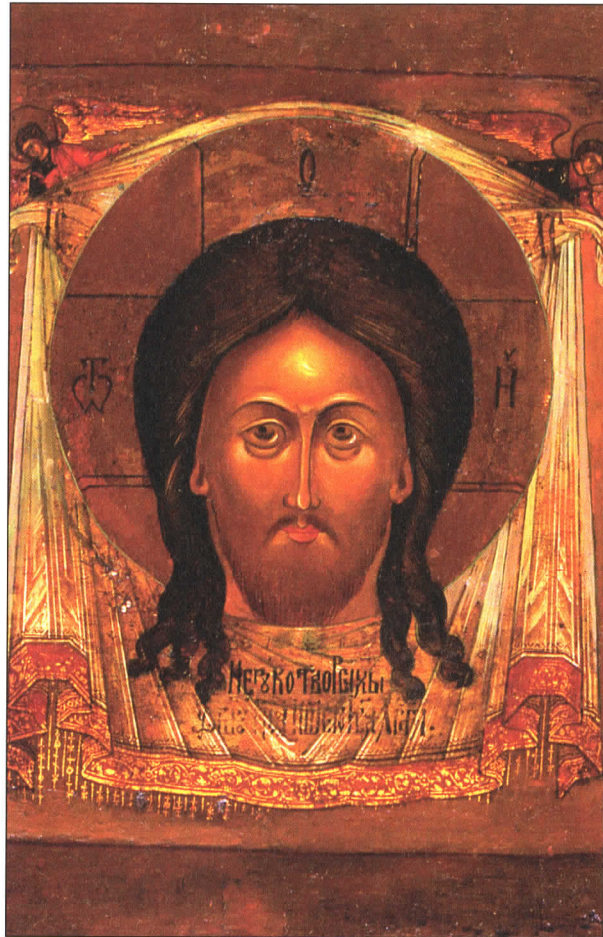
In addition, I am grateful to the Oakland University Provost's office for awarding a 2002 University Student Research Scholar Award to art history major Corey Gross, who was able to combine his interests in art history and Russian language and culture in working with me on the exhibition.

A special note of thanks to Professor Lisa Ngote, for the excellent photographs that appear in this catalog, and to Jacky Leow and Dick Goody of the MBAG for their guidance and good humor in the planning and execution of this project. Lastly, I am grateful to Professor Emeritus Carl Barnes for his kind assistance in the installation of the exhibition.

TAMARA MACHMUT-JHASHI, PH.D.
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY



RESURRECTION
OIL / PANEL 11 x 16"
19th / 20th century



CHRIST ACHEIROPOIETOS
("NOT MADE BY HUMAN HANDS")
TEMPERA / PANEL 10 x 12"
19th century

The image 'not made by human hands' has its origins in the fifth century legend of Syrian King Abgar of Edessa, who, falling ill, sent a messenger to Jesus to ask for healing. The messenger returned with a cloth that Jesus had pressed to his face. Abgar was healed with the miraculous cloth that held the imprint of Christ's face. The Acheiropoietos icon shows only Christ's face, without neck or shoulders, adding to the miraculous sense of His appearance, transcending time and place. The large eyes and schematized features are reminiscent of traditional Byzantine painting, but are here rendered with a human tenderness.

THE MAKING OF AN ICON

The creation of an icon is a long and laborious task that is often overlooked by its simplistic appearance. The hours of preparation of the physical icon are daunting, which does not include the time of preparation required of the iconographer himself. "To make an icon is the fulfillment of prayer," states Father Zinon, a monk and iconographer from the Monastery of the Caves near Pskov. "You need to feel the Holy Spirit. You can feel icons only during prayer. And icons are only for prayer. An icon is a place of prayer. You paint it in the same way you prepare for a church service, with prayer and fasting. It is a liturgical work. Preparing to paint an icon is like preparing to celebrate the Holy Liturgy."¹

Icons are made in a variety of media including bas-relief, mosaic, fresco, and even oil on canvas; however, the primary medium has been and remains egg tempera on wood panel. Selection of the wood is of vital importance. It must be made of a sturdy non-resinous wood such as oak, beech, ash, birch or cypress. Pine with low resinous content could also be used. Boards were cut from the thickest point of the tree after the trunk had been split along the grain.² Boards were taken from the section closest to the center of the tree to give the greatest solidity, size (if required), and strength. The frame is next carved into the board. Unlike a traditional western painting where the frame is merely an added adornment, a second entity, the frame of the icon, is made of the same wood, an integral part of the main image. The frame of an icon can carry inscriptions, prayers, or scenes from the life of the depicted saint. The main area of the picture plane was often recessed between two and five centimeters, and sometimes up to fifteen. This recession of the primary picture plane was not only for the protection of the main image but was also a useful design when the icon was being painted. A flat straight edge could be placed over the icon for the iconographer to place his hand while painting without fear of damaging other portions of the painted surface.

The frame must be set on the side of the board which is toward the center of the tree trunk. During the drying process and over the many years of an icon's existence the rings in the wood spread out and result in warping (which is why many icons appear convex). The grain of the wood must also fit vertically with the picture plane.

To help counteract the inevitable warping of the icon two horizontal wedges of a harder wood are placed into the back side. Generally, elongated trapezoid braces are placed into corresponding carved niches carved in the back with the widest end of the brace on the outer side of each side of the board to create a stable fit. The recessed area inside the frame is then lightly scored with a fine tool to hold the surface that will actually be painted, because the wood is not painted on directly. A thin, fine, loosely woven fabric is cut to size and glued to the board using natural fish glue; sturgeon glue was generally used in Russia. Gesso layers made of glue and alabaster or chalk are then added to the cloth. This step requires five to seven thin layers without air bubbles or defects of any kind and with a drying time of at least half a day between each layer. This process alone can take upwards of a week. The surface is then finely sanded to a smooth, flat, matte finish free of chalk dust.

The preparation of this portion of the icon is of critical importance because the solidity of icon image will depend on this gesso ground. The underlying drawing of the icon is then made on the gesso surface. These preliminary drawings were made in a variety of ways: directly drawn on with lead pencil or etched with a stylus. These direct methods were generally reserved for master iconographers. Most iconographers kept sketches of icon patterns and designs so that they could not only use them repeatedly but also keep the tradition of the icon. These collections of sketches or guides were called *podliniki*.³ There was no desire to reinvent each image as it was created but to be consistent with and give reverence to past images. Novice painters would generally trace an existing icon onto paper, rub the back with red ochre powder, then the drawing would be traced over again on the prepared board, or perforate the outline of the image on paper and dust the powder through the holes leaving the image on the board.

If the icon is to be gilded for the halos or the entire background, it is applied after the initial drawing. A mixture of linseed oil, a drying agent, and varnish is layered on the areas that will be gilded. The painstaking task of applying the gold leaf is then done when the bonding mixture is almost completely dry so that it does not stick to the iconographer's fingers. The edges of the gilded areas are then cleaned with a pointed knife and the excess gold ground to use as liquid gold.

At last, the actual painting of the icon begins. Egg tempera is the preferred and time-honored medium. Fresh yolk is separated from the white (if white gets into the mixture the resulting paint will crack) and mixed with an equal amount of water and a small amount of vinegar. Beer or *kvass* (a traditional beverage made from fermented rye, wheat or barley) would also be used instead of vinegar to help prevent the mixture from deterioration and reduce the greasiness of the yolk. Pigment is then added to the yolk mixture. Natural organic colors found in animal and vegetable substances and mineral pigments are used. Ground to a fine powder, they are added to the yolk mixture. The mixing of paints is an art in itself, the ratio of yolk to water to vinegar to pigment could vary greatly depending on the pigment and temperature of the season. Too much yolk and the paint would crack, too little and it would flake off; more vinegar in summer, less in winter, but prepared properly the paints become durable and resistant to chemical decomposition under the influence of sunlight.

The painting proceeds in a directed, methodical manner. First the entire icon is covered in a local color; for example, in Novgorod this often was red, in Pskov, green. The outline would then be traced again in a darker hue of this color. Thin translucent layers are built up from a dark base to lighter colors. The multiple washes of color build on the surface so that the icon is actually slightly modeled. When the final light colors are painted, the outlines blurred by the washes are repainted. “*Enliveners*” are added to areas of three-dimensional objects requiring the brightest touches of light.⁴ Liquid gold is then painted on the proper highlights and inscriptions are then painted and the icon is left to dry for several days or even weeks.

After fully drying, the surface of the icon is covered with olipha, a varnish made from boiled linseed oil and one or more other resins, usually amber. The layer of olipha permeates the colors of the painting, through the ground and down into the wood of the board. This both protects the icon but also gives it depth and translucency. This protective layer, unfortunately, has a tendency to darken with age while absorbing dust and ash. The layer can be carefully removed, however, to reveal brilliant colors below.

Once the physical act of creating the icon is complete, one task yet remains: the blessing of the icon. The icon is kept on the altar table in the sanctuary and is formally blessed by the priest the following day after the Liturgy, preferably in the presence of the owners. Creating an icon not only requires mastery of these laborious techniques but also requires the fervent belief of the creator. The making of an icon is an act and fulfillment of prayer.

Prayer of an Iconographer

O heavenly Master, fervent architect of all creation, light the gaze of your servant, guard his heart and guide his hand, so that worthily and with perfection he may represent your image, for the glory and beauty of your Holy Church. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever and unto ages of ages. Amen.⁵

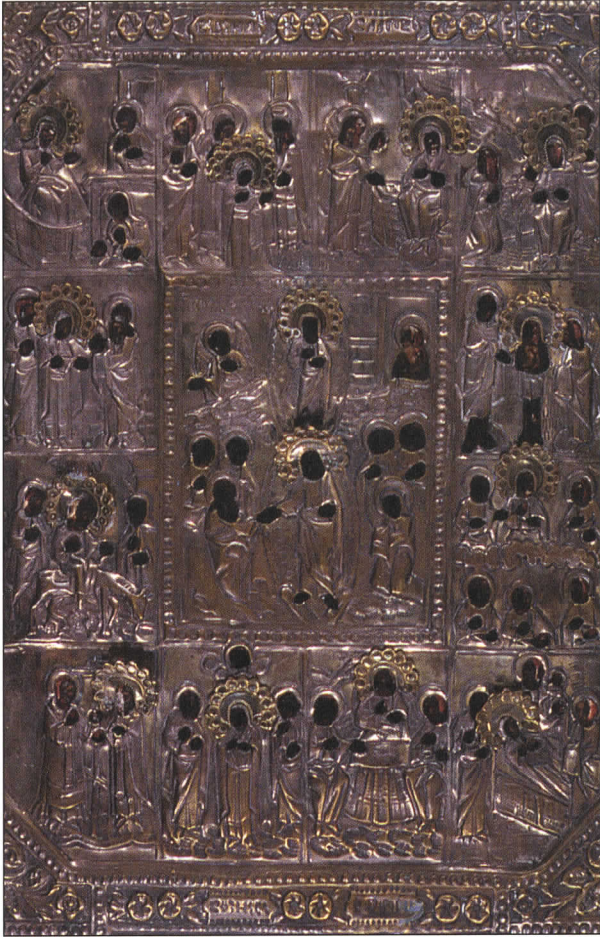
¹ Jim Forest, *Praying with Icons* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 19-20.
² Egon Sendler, *The Icon: Image of the Invisible*. (Hong Kong: Oakwood Publications, 1988), 188.
³ Sendler, 193.
⁴ Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, trans. G.E.H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky. (Crestwood, NY: St.Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), 54-55.
⁵ Forest, 23.

ESSAY BY COREY GROSS
ART HISTORY STUDENT
OAKLAND UNIVERSITY



CALENDAR ICON
TEMPERA / PANEL 13 x 16"
19th century

This elaborately painted work is a ‘menological’ icon, representing a month of the liturgical calendar. The saints, martyrs, prophets, and ascetics whose lives are commemorated in the month of September (the first month of the liturgical year) are included here. Two great feasts are also celebrated in September: the Nativity of the Virgin (8th) and the Exaltation of the Cross (14th).



FESTAL ICON
OIL / PANEL / BRONZE OKLAD 14 x 12"
19th century

Scenes of the twelve Great Feasts of the liturgical year.



ST. NICHOLAS THE WONDERWORKER
SILVER / PANEL 14 x 12"
19th century

This beautiful icon in silver is the product of the Ivan Khlebnikov workshop of Moscow. Khlebnikov's firm emerged alongside those of his contemporaries, Pavel Ovchinnikov and Carl Fabergé, as part of a revival in Russian decorative arts in the latter half of the nineteenth century, particularly in the techniques of enameling and metalwork.



ICON WITH SAINTS
TEMPERA / PANEL 17 x 19"

BETWEEN MATTER AND SPIRIT: RUSSIAN ICON PAINTING

Introduction

In the western world the term 'icon' is used to convey the idea of representation, to denote an image that is usually widely recognized, or even revered. It is commonplace to describe a well-known figure from popular culture as a 'pop icon,' and we also refer to great works of art such as the *Mona Lisa* as 'icons' of western art. In the recent past the term icon has even found a new semantic home in referring to the symbols we see on our computer screens. But the term 'icon' has another, more specialized meaning. For Orthodox Christians, icons are painted images (the term derives from the Greek *eikon*, meaning "image") that have played a significant role in the theological and liturgical life of the Church. In Russia, a tradition of icon painting developed from the early eleventh century and has continued, under varying circumstances, to the present day. For a thousand years, the fundamental tenets of Russian icon painting have remained constant, a consistency made all the more remarkable in light of centuries of dramatic political and social changes.

In physical terms, icons are traditionally painted with egg tempera on a wood panel. There is a fairly standard process involved in creating the images, from using certain kinds of wood to mixing and applying the pigments. Geographical variations do exist, reflecting the particular needs of artists in adapting to their resources; however, there is a striking uniformity in the use of materials. Imagery too follows a strict canon, so that artists are not free to paint from imagination, but must adhere to established guidelines. The reason for such an intense standardization in process and in iconography can be found in the theological role that icons play in the Church. Without an understanding of the religious function of these painted images, icons lose much of their significance. What makes this art alive and profound, and not simply a static, conservative form of painting that adheres to a strict formula, is the nature of the *relationship* between the believer and the image. The power of the icon derives from its theological importance as a *window*, or point of entry, into the world of the spirit. Icons are, according to the fifth century writer St. Dionysius Aeropagite, 'visible images of mysterious and invisible things.'¹ Icons occupy a realm of their own, a realm *between matter and spirit*.

The Theological Meaning of the Icon

An Orthodox worshiper views icons as an integral part of the liturgy and Church tradition. Contrary to the western tradition of religious painting, icons are not decorative images meant simply to adorn church walls; rather, they are equal to the authority of the Gospels. The VIth Ecumenical Council at Nicaea (787) established the special theological role that the veneration of images played. The Church Fathers asserted that icons were on the same level as Holy Scripture: "We preserve, without innovations, all the Church traditions established for us, whether written or not written, one of which is icon painting, as corresponding to what the Gospels preach and relate . . . For if the one is shown by the other, the one is incontestably made clear by the other."² Thus, the painted images of the icon (which are still today described as having been "written" rather than painted) are ascribed the same liturgical and doctrinal importance as the written Gospels. In its function, then, the icon in the eastern Church serves a different purpose than religious imagery does in the west. The notion that icons 'do not serve religion, but are an integral part of religion, one of the instruments of the knowledge of God' is a crucial difference from the western conception of imagery as illustration or decoration.³

Why is it said of Orthodox worshipers that they 'venerate' an icon? What exactly is the relationship between the believer and the image? To answer this fundamental question it is necessary to understand the Church's teaching on the Incarnation; namely, the notion that because the Son of God became man, it became possible to depict Him in imagery. The Divine became flesh in Christ: both human and divine united in one essence. In 451 the Council of Chalcedon (the Fourth Ecumenical Council) defined the Church's understanding of "one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, known in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation."⁴ While this has remained the position of the Church until the present day, the issue of the dual nature of Christ was the source of much debate. Those who refused to accept this as dogma were among those responsible for the backlash against the icon during the era of Iconoclasm. Varying in intensity throughout the eight and ninth centuries, particularly in the east, the efforts of the so-called iconoclasts, or "image-breakers," were attempts to ban religious imagery on the grounds of idolatry. Controversial and divisive, the charges of the iconoclasts led to the destruction of icons and the whitewashing of church walls. The strongest wording in support of the creation of icons came from the church fathers at the VIIth Ecumenical Council in 787 in Nicaea. The Council based its position partly on the writings of St. John of Damascus, one of the key apologists for the veneration of icons. In his *Discourse in Defense of Divine Images*, St. John wrote:

If you have understood that the Incorporeal One became man for you, then it is evident that you can portray His human image. Since the Invisible One became visible by assuming a human body, you can make a picture of Him who was seen.⁵

The Council thus confirmed the appropriateness of representing Christ because of His dual nature, since He became 'visible, tangible, and therefore describable.'⁶ The period of Iconoclasm finally came to an end in the ninth century with the efforts of Empress Theodora, who, with the sanction of the VIth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, restored the display of icons in churches on the first Sunday of Lent in 842. Today the Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy is still celebrated by Orthodox Christians around the world at the beginning of Lent to commemorate the importance of the iconic tradition.

For the Orthodox believer, it is not the actual icon that is worshiped; rather, it is the person/s on whom that image is modeled who is venerated. The icon comes to function as a window, or screen, to the holy person depicted, to lead the believer into communion with the ‘divinely illumined’ personage represented. It is understood that there is a relationship between the image depicted in the icon and its prototype, and that contemplating the image opens our consciousness to a spiritual realm, to those ‘mysterious and supernatural visions’ described by St. Dionysus Aeropagite. In his book *Iconostasis*, the Russian theologian Pavel Florenskii expressed the relationship this way, addressing the icon painter:

...no longer [do we see] your masterpiece – but the wholly real images themselves. I gaze into this icon and I say in myself: this is She Herself, not Her image, but She Herself, who, with your help, icon painter, I am contemplating. As though through a window, I see the Mother of God...A window is only a window, and the board of an icon is merely wood, paint, and finish. But through the window...you have shown Her to me, but you did not create her; rather, you have parted the veil so that She, who was behind it, now stands as a real experience not only for me but also for you...”⁷

The Role of the Icon Painter

Because icons are not considered objects of fine art in the same way that religious paintings have been regarded in the western world, the role of the icon painter is markedly different in the view of the Orthodox Church. Throughout the history of the eastern Church, and particularly the Russian church, the life of the icon painter held special significance. Traditionally, icon painters were first and foremost Orthodox believers. It was incumbent upon them to follow strictly fixed rules that governed not only the process of painting, but the proper spiritual groundwork in prayer and obedience. A majority of icon painters were monks who prepared themselves for the tasks of depicting holy images. Indeed, the western idea of an artist as someone who pursues his/her own imagination through a fine art medium is completely anathema to traditional icon painting. Nor were icon painters simply thought of as craftsmen, completing commissions for the ornamentation of churches; rather, they were devout believers working in the service of the Church. Pious, moral behavior was expected in the personal lives of iconographers. In Russia in the sixteenth century, in response to increasing ‘degrading’ influences from western art, a lengthy decree issued by the 100-Chapters Council described the code by which icon painters should live:

Let it be known that the icon painter shall be meek, humble, and reverent, neither filled with vain talk, nor empty laughter, nor quarrelsome, nor envious, not a drinker of spirits, not a thief nor a murderer; and above all things, that he shall sustain in great mindfulness a pure chastity of soul and body...”⁸

The Council’s decree conveyed explicit instructions to the icon painter in terms of proper behavior and protocol with elders. It was the duty of archbishops and bishops to inspect the fruit of the icon painter’s labors and to ensure that the successful painter’s rights and status ‘above’ ordinary persons be honored. It also made clear that icon painters were forbidden to fashion capricious changes to traditional imagery. Not only were arbitrary changes culled from the artist’s imagination prohibited, but serious consequences were to follow if such a path were taken. An icon painter who ignored tradition would be condemned to eternal torment.

The fact that icon painters follow a set of conventional subjects in their work has not meant that all icons are rendered mechanically. Without question, individual artists have made their mark in terms of style and quality. Andrei Rublëv and Theophanes the Greek were two of the most accomplished icon painters in Russian art history, recognized for the high quality of their work and the individual pathos discerned in their respective styles.

The Role of the Icon in Orthodox Life

Icons are found in three main contexts in the life of the Orthodox believer. First, they are commonly found in the homes of the faithful. Usually of small, portable size, icons in this context play an important role in the ritual of personal prayer. Often the home of an Orthodox believer will feature a corner of a room reserved for the display of icons (*krasnyi ugolok*, the “beautiful corner”). This practice cuts across all social and economic lines; the simple peasant had icons in his home as did the most prominent member of the aristocratic class. A second role of icons in the Church is in their ‘miracle-working’ capacity. Throughout the centuries, the faithful have believed in the power of icons to heal, to protect, and to repel enemies. Miracle-working icons have been venerated by individuals as well as by entire communities, often being carried in procession or ‘invited’ for visits to neighboring cities or regions. Hundreds of examples exist that speak to the miracle-working function of these specially venerated images. The famous *Virgin of Vladimir*, for example, was said to be instrumental in turning back Tatar invaders on several occasions, of driving out Polish invaders in 1612, and of defeating Napoleon’s army in the nineteenth century.⁹

Perhaps the most visually spectacular function of icons is their appearance in what is called the iconostasis, or “icon-screen” in Orthodox churches. The *iconostasis* is a wall that marks the dividing line between the altar or sanctuary of the church and the area of the faithful – a symbolic divide, separating the material world from mystery, “suggesting a spiritual passage into another world which remains invisible to our earthly eyes.”¹⁰ Developed from the low screen or wall commonly found in early Christian churches, the Russian variant matured early in the fifteenth century and consisted of screens with up to five rows or tiers of images. Images on the iconostasis follow a strict hierarchical arrangement, with certain subjects reserved for each tier. The spiritual center is the Deesis row that



SMOLENSK MOTHER OF GOD
OIL / PANEL 21 x 25 "
19th century

Among the most revered variants of the Theotokos (Mother of God), the Smolensk Mother closely follows the solemnity of its Byzantine prototype, which is believed to have been brought from Byzantium to Chernigov in 1046. It was given to the Cathedral in Smolensk in 1101 and has become one of the most popularly venerated of the ‘miracle-working’ icons (including playing the role of intercessor at the Battle of Borodino in 1812). The figures of Mother and Child, painted in a naturalistic manner, are set in a complex decorative background.



ST. PANTELEIMON THE HEALER
OIL / PANEL 9 x 11 "
19th century

Martyred in 305, St. Panteleimon (meaning “all-merciful”) was a doctor who healed those afflicted with illness. Many stories of miraculous cure are attributed to his powers. Shown with a box of medicine and spoon, St, Panteleimon intercedes for the suffering and infirm.

features Christ in the center, flanked by the Theokotos, the Mother of God and St. John the Baptist, then the archangels Michael and Gabriel, SS. Peter and Paul, apostles, martyrs, and so on. Upper tiers include rows of Old Testament prophets, scenes of the twelve liturgical feasts, and patriarchs. The central Royal Doors, through which only clergy can pass to the sanctuary, are reserved for scenes of the Annunciation, the four evangelists, St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom.

The iconostasis is often the most sumptuously decorated part of an Orthodox church. Its symbolic function warrants that it receive the most lavish attention. “Although, on the one hand, it is a screen dividing the Divine world from the human world, the iconostasis at the same time unites the two worlds into one whole in an image which reflects a state of the universe where all separation is overcome, where there is achieved a reconciliation between God and the creature, and within the creature itself.”¹¹ The iconostasis, therefore, performs the most compelling function of the Church itself; it presents a visual schema for the reconciliation of two realms – the human and the divine.

A History of Russian Icon Painting

Icons appeared in Russia soon after Grand Prince Vladimir converted Kievan Rus’ to Orthodox Christianity in 989. Legend held that Vladimir sent emissaries to observe the practices of various religions – Islam, Judaism, western Catholicism, and eastern Orthodoxy. So impressed by the beauty of the liturgy witnessed in Constantinople, the emissaries claimed to Vladimir that they ‘knew not whether they were in heaven or on earth....for on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty.’¹² Their testimony, along with the fact that Vladimir’s grandmother, Olga, had herself been baptized and converted to Orthodoxy some thirty years before, undoubtedly acted as catalysts for the prince’s conversion. But another factor ultimately sealed Russia’s fate: Vladimir’s marriage to Princess Anna, sister of the Byzantine emperor. By marrying Anna, which required that Vladimir convert to Orthodoxy, he gained a powerful political ally in the east, while conversely, the Byzantine rulers could eliminate a potential threat from the west. This politically strategic move changed the course of Russian history.

The earliest church related art in Kiev was imported from Byzantium. The church of Saint Sophia, a major architectural monument in Kiev constructed in 1037 by Prince Yaroslav I, was inspired by the magnificent Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Along with Byzantine builders, painters arrived in Kiev to decorate early churches with frescoes and icons. One of the earliest icons to appear in Russia was the *Virgin of Vladimir*, painted by Greek masters and brought to Kiev around 1150. Moved to the city of Vladimir in 1155 by Prince Andrei Bogolubskii (the ‘God-lover’) it remained housed there for over 200 years in the Cathedral of the Dormition. Understanding the potent symbolic nature of the icon, Muscovite princes transferred the work to Moscow in 1395 as the city emerged as the center of political authority. It has remained there until the present day, revered for its miracle-working power, protecting the Russian state from the time of the Mongol occupation down to recent events of political turmoil in the 1990s. The *Virgin of Vladimir* has inspired countless copies throughout the centuries, making the Umilenie (‘Tenderness’) Mother of God the most popular and enduring in Russian iconography.

Early Russian icons were indebted to their Byzantine prototypes in style. Characterized by hieratic, flattened figures, emphatically frontal and stylized in form, these first Russian icons resembled the imposing authority of their Greek models. The pre-Mongol period of Russian icons painting (twelfth and early thirteenth centuries) was marked by an assimilation of Byzantine style and iconography. From the 1240s to the middle of the fourteenth century Russia was under the political domination of the Mongols khans, which effectively severed important cultural ties to Byzantium for about a hundred years. During that period local schools of icon painting flourished, particularly in the northern cities of Novgorod and Pskov. Prosperous from trade, the wealthy citizens of Novgorod had the financial means to commission great numbers of icons. A distinctive local style emerged, characterized by a strong emphasis on line and brilliant color, especially bright vermilion contrasted by areas of blue, green and white. The famous fourteenth icon of St. George the Victorious in the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg is an excellent example of the dynamic color, elegant line, and rhythmical compositional movement that typified the Novgorodian style. Moreover, the iconographical repertoire expanded considerably in this period, particularly with the depiction of saints who were of significance to the local population. St. George, for example, became enormously popular in Novgorod for his role as protector of peasants and merchants. Saints Nicholas, Elijah, and Paraskeva were also frequently depicted because of their direct links with the people.

Greek influence was once again strongly felt in Russian icon painting toward the end of the fourteenth century. ‘Theophanes the Greek’ arrived in Novgorod in the 1370s from Constantinople and quickly earned a high reputation as an icon and fresco painter. His style reflected the classical revival of the Palaeologan Renaissance in Byzantium, which dated from the late thirteenth century to the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Working first in Novgorod, then in Moscow, Theophanes’ influence was significant. Greater naturalism in color, a softening of the static hieratic quality common to earlier Byzantine style, and an elegant treatment of the figure marked the freshness of vision Theophanes infused into Russian painting. These qualities influenced a younger painter in Russia, who became the greatest iconographer in Russian history — Andrei Rublëv.

Rublëv’s painting of *The Holy Trinity* (1411) is perhaps the most widely known icon in Russia. It is a national treasure that epitomizes the ‘golden age’ of Russian icon painting. Its importance in representing the highest standard of icon painting was recognized by the

Hundred Chapters Council in 1551, which claimed the work to be the most perfect example of iconic art. What made Rublëv’s *Trinity* so admired was the artist’s consummate skill in composition, color, and expression. The work features three angels, balanced in a rhythmical flow and unified around a central table in a perfect circle. The elegant treatment of line and subtle color harmonies (brilliant shades of blue and green) adds to the masterful depiction of the symbolic union of a triune God. Rublëv was a monk at the Trinity-Sergius Monastery, where he dedicated himself to the teachings of St. Sergius of Radonezh. St. Sergius was revered for leading a life devoted to prayer, self-discipline, and forging peace. The Trinity was especially venerated by Sergius as a concept that symbolized perfect unity; Rublëv’s icon resonated with his message of spiritual peace.

Rublev’s *Trinity* also serves as an excellent example of a key feature of icon painting: inverse, or reverse, perspective. Although painted in the fifteenth century, at a time when western artists were developing the system of linear perspective, Rublev’s work features a strikingly different way of handling pictorial space. Antithetical to the Renaissance notion of a ‘window onto space,’ the space in an icon operates on the opposite premise: rather than depicting the illusion of a receding space, the space in an icon *advances out* toward the viewer. The focal point is not *within* the painting, but *outside* it, converging in front of the icon at the point of the viewer. The viewer, in this system, becomes an active participant in the spatial dynamic – not in the western sense that pictorial space reproduces the illusion of the viewer’s natural world, but in the sense that the spiritual (i.e., illogical) realm of iconic space embraces the viewer.

Icon painting became largely standardized in the sixteenth century. In the mid-1550s the Hundred Chapters Council codified the path that icon painters were expected to take: “The painters will reproduce the ancient models, those of the Greek icon painters, of Andrei Rublëv, and other famous painters...in nothing will the painters follow their own imaginations.”¹³ As a result of increasing communications with western Europe, a major departure from tradition occurred in the seventeenth century. In the 1600s foreign diplomats arrived in Moscow, along with foreign architects and engineers commissioned to undertake building projects in the city. Although Russia never experienced the Renaissance in the western sense of the word, by the seventeenth century western naturalism had filtered through to influence Russian artists.

One of the last great icon painters in Russia, Simon Ushakov, created a hybrid style that blended traditional painting with the western pictorial devices of linear perspective and three-dimensional modeling of figures. The result was a complex merging of west and east, seen in the development of a type of portrait icon called a *parsuna*, which Ushakov pioneered in his workshops at the Kremlin Armory. The *parsuna* was a portrait, in the western secular sense, painted in a naturalistic style (three-dimensional modeling of the figure) in the context of a traditional icon. For some this was innovation; for others, it signaled an unwelcome dilution. Ridding traditional painting of foreign elements was one issue that divided the church in the Great Schism beginning in 1667. The religious reforms of Patriarch Nikon met with vehement opposition by the archpriest Avvakum, who led a movement to rid Russia of all impure (western) influences. Avvakum and his followers, who became known as the Old Believers, destroyed icons that bore the influences of the west, such as those produced by Ushakov. Avvakum voiced his opinion against the so-called “Frankish style:”

God hath allowed the wrong-makers of icons to multiply in our land. They paint the images of Immanuel the Savior with plump faces, red lips, dimpled fingers, and large fat legs and thighs, and altogether make him look like a German, fat-bellied and corpulent....The only difference is that there is no sword painted at his hip”¹⁴

Eventually the unwillingness of the Old Believers to adapt to new circumstances resulted in their alienation from the mainstream of the church, and, in some cases, to their persecution. But the division within the church had long-lasting ramifications. It would open the door to the greatest ‘westernizer’ in Russian history: Peter the Great.

With the reign of Peter the Great (1689-1725) Russia opened to the west in nearly every sphere of life. Adopting western modes of thought, dress, and customs, Peter set into motion a radical restructuring of cultural life. Aspects of European Baroque art were now found in Russian architecture, painting, and sculpture. Icon painting also changed dramatically in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as Russia integrated more fully with the rest of Europe. Beginning with Peter, and continuing with Catherine the Great and the Romanov tsars in the nineteenth century, Russian rulers supported the secular arts that emulated European styles. Thus the Baroque and Neo-classical styles that dominated Europe found their counterparts in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Icon painting in the nineteenth century experienced a decline generally. The use of oil paint (instead of traditional tempera) allowed artists to convey an even greater degree of illusionism; icons produced in this era are strikingly realistic in style. Iconographically, however, the images still adhered to the strict rules that had been sanctioned by the church centuries earlier. Icons were now decorated with elaborate metalwork covers that protected the painting underneath. Brass and silver *oklads* became popular, and several studios opened in Moscow and St. Petersburg that specialized in fine silver, including the workshops of Carl Faberge, Pavel Ovchinnikov, and Ivan Khlebnikov.

Another trend in the nineteenth century was the wider distribution of cheaper, mass-produced icons that were not as refined in technique. Several centers of production emerged, including that of Palekh, which is better known today for the production of traditional

wooden lacquer boxes. A good deal of the preservation of older techniques of hand-painting remained in the hands of the Old Believers, who still, at the end of the nineteenth century, were occupied with safeguarding traditional Orthodox life.

The early years of the twentieth century witnessed a revival of icon painting. Interestingly, the catalyst for this resurgence was the generation of avant-garde artists that included Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, Kazimir Malevich, and Vasilii Kandinsky. The early modernist vanguard discovered an expressive potential in the color and line of icon painting that resonated in the context of post-impressionist and early modern art – flattened pictorial space, bold and arbitrary color, and rejection of linear perspective. The Russian avant-garde encouraged a new appreciation of an ancient tradition. In the years before the first world war, a large-scale effort to clean and restore old icon paintings permitted a new generation to see the works in their original colors; not only did it inspire native artists, but also western painters such as Matisse, who visited Moscow in 1911, were deeply influenced by the alternative ways of seeing that icons suggested.¹⁵

Icon painting continues in contemporary Russia; it is an art that has seen another revival since the political demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. Although icon painting was not entirely stamped out after the Russian revolution in 1917, the Church suffered a great deal during seventy years of Communist rule. Many churches had to close, priests were victimized, and consequently the art of icon painting became a rare enterprise. In the decade of the 1990s, however, Russians experienced a renewed connection to their faith and a return to the spiritual life of the Church. Seminaries are now active; icon painters are reestablishing their native craft. While political circumstances may have radically changed, the fundamental content of icons have not. The spiritual power of the icon in the life of Orthodox believers remains much the same in the twenty-first century as it did a thousand years ago.

¹ See Pavel Florenskii, *Iconostasis*, transl. Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimirs's Seminary Press, 1996), p. 65.

² Quoted by Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, in *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), p. 30.

³ Ouspensky and Lossky, p. 31.

⁴ See Michel Quenot, *The Icon: Window on the Kingdom* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), p. 39.

⁵ St. John of Damascus, cited in Quenot, p. 42.

⁶ Ouspensky, p. 34.

⁷ Florenskii, p. 69.

⁸ See Florenskii, pp. 92-95.

⁹ See W. Bruce Lincoln, *Between Heaven and Hell: The Story of a Thousand Years of Artistic Life in Russia* (New York: Viking, 1998), p. 24.

¹⁰ Quenot, p. 48.

¹¹ Ouspensky and Lossky, p. 60.

¹² For further discussion of the account given by Vladimir's emissaries and of the establishment of Orthodoxy in Russia, see James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe; an Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1966).

¹³ See Quenot, pp. 92-95.

¹⁴ Lincoln, pp. 52-53.

¹⁵ While Matisse was in Moscow to install the murals *Dance* and *Music* in the home of the Russian collector Sergei Shchukhin, he visited a number of churches and viewed the icon collection at the Tretyakov Gallery.

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ARCHANGEL MICHAEL
TEMPERA / PANEL 9 x 7"
19th/20th century

The archangel Michael is shown trampling the devil underfoot and pulling his sword from the scabbard. Depicted as a winged, victorious soldier, Michael is in the presence of God the Father who appears in the heavens. The scene is painted in a naturalistic style, while the gold-leaf border of the icon is rendered with a decorative pattern of interlace, reminiscent of the ornamentation found in medieval illuminated manuscripts. Signed by D.M. Matrevski (approx.), Kiev.



SAINTS PETER AND PAUL
TEMPERA / PANEL 12 x 8"
19th/20th century

St. Peter is shown seated holding the Gospels and the key to heaven while on the right St. Paul stands with a closed Gospel book. Set in a detailed landscape within a highly ornate border that resembles that found in the icon of the Archangel Michael suggests that the two icons were painted in the same iconographer's workshop in Kiev. Signed D.M. Matrevski (approx.)



ST. NICHOLAS THE WONDERWORKER
OIL / PANEL / SILVER OKLAD 13 x 14"
c. 1880s

Upholder of Orthodoxy, St. Nicholas is perhaps the most frequently depicted saint in Russian iconography. Venerated for his powers of protection, intercession and healing, the Bishop of Myra is widely admired for his humility and remains the patron saint of children, of travelers, and of Russia herself.



ST. NICHOLAS THE WONDERWORKER
METAL / ENAMEL 5 x 6"
19th / 20th century

RUSSIAN SAMOVARS

Tea appeared in Russia, only then in Europe. Until the eighteenth century, *sbiten* (a mixture of hot water, herbs, and honey) was the Russian national beverage before tea became widely popular. Tea is derived from the Chinese *che* ('young leaf'). Legend has it that the Chinese emperor or slave accidentally dropped a few leaves of Chinese camellia (*che*) and this was how the beverage was discovered.

In 1567, during the rule of Ivan IV (the Terrible), the Cossack Ottomans, Petrov and Yalchev, brought tea to the Siberian area of Russia. In 1638 one of the western Mongolian khans (Altyn Khan) sent a gift of 64 kilograms of dry tea leaves to the first Romanov Tsar, Mikhail Feodorovich. The tea was delivered to the Romanov court by the Russian ambassador to Mongolia, Vasilii Starkov. In 1674 the price of a pound of tea leaves in Moscow was about 30 *kopeks*. At that time the Russian national drink, *kvas* (made of fermented rye), was still the prevailing beverage of ordinary Russian people. Wine and champagne became fashionable in the Russian court at the beginning of the 18th century during the rule of Peter the Great. Tea, however, grew rapidly in popularity, and by the end of the 18th century during the rule of Catherine the Great, Russia's consumption of tea was second in the world. Russia produced its own tea only in 1901, planted first at Soloch-aul on the River Chache by local peasant enthusiasts.

There is no unified opinion on the origin of the word *samovar*, but there are two widely held theories – the first holds that the word derives from the Mongolian *samobar*, which referred to a vessel used in Mongolia for centuries. The second is that the samovar is a derivative of two common Russian words: 'samo' 'varit' ('self' 'boiling'). The latter is a common way of coining names in Russian, and has its counterparts in *samogon* ('self' 'moonshine'), *samokat* ('self-propelled device'), and *samodel'* ('self-made').

The Russian samovar, a 'self-boiling' device with an internal heating chamber, became enormously popular in the nineteenth century. A forerunner of the samovar was the *sbittennik*, an early 'self-boiling' vessel that could be used to boil tea. Examples of the samovar's ancestors include self-boiling apparatus known in China, the so-called *cho-go*, which was used to serve hot soup. Tea in China, however, was served in pots. Scientists and archeologists also note another possible antecedent of the samovar in the type of vessel known as the *authepsa*, found in ancient Pompeii. The Romans used the *authepsa* to heat water that would later be added to wine.

The first samovars were manufactured in the Ural Mountains. It is believed that the famous cutler and entrepreneur, Nikita Demidov, from the city of Tula, moved to the Ural Mountains in 1701, taking with him skilled copper masters. It is believed that those Tula copper masters helped to establish samovar production at the Demidov manufacturing in 1740.

The eighteenth century marked the period of development of samovar production in Russia.

The first properly hallmarked Demidov samovars with the initials E. V. G. are known from 1752-53. In the 1760s, the Ural manufacturers of Stroganov and Turganinov also appeared on the market. Samovar production in Moscow was known in the 1760s, produced by the firm of Aleksandr Shmakov. Samovar manufacturing was established considerably later in St. Petersburg, sometime around 1812.

The city of Tula, about 100 miles south of Moscow, became famous for the manufacture of Russian samovars. Indeed, in Russian culture, Tula is inextricably linked with the production of the samovar. As early as 1632 the first plant for cast-iron and metal work was established by the Dutch businessman, Vinus. This plant produced artillery and shells. Soon the city of Tula earned its notoriety as the preeminent metal producing city in Russia, and became equally known for its production of military hardware.

The first Tula manufacturing firm was established by the Lisitsyn brothers, Ivan and Nazar, in 1778. By the middle of the 19th century, it was reported that 28 samovar factories were functioning in the city. By 1890 it was 74. The largest samovar manufacturers in Tula were the Batashevs, the Kapyrzins, the brothers Shemarin and Teile. From 1825 to 1917, twenty-six separate Batashev factories were known in Tula. Many of these were founded by different Batashev families (not necessarily related to each other) or other entrepreneurs working under the name of "Batashev factory." The workshops of Nikolai Ivanovich and Ivan Aleksandrovich were the oldest Bateshev factories in Tula, founded in 1825. In 1850 the firm "N G Batashev – N E Batashev" received the right to use the hallmark of the imperial seal, the double-headed eagle. In 1855 this firm received the honorable title of "Supplier to the Imperial Court."

The well-known firm of Vasilii Stepanovich Batashev, founded in Tula in 1840, was the first to receive the highest award of the double-headed eagle (Imperial Seal) at the All-Russian Trade/Manufacturing Exhibition in 1896 in Nizhni Novgorod. The firm also received three Grand Prizes for samovar production: at the St. Petersburg International Exhibition, at an International Exhibition in Paris in 1894, and in Turin in 1911.

Samovar production was also established by I. F. Kapyrzin in 1860. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Kapyrzin factory produced about a hundred different styles of samovars.

In 1887 the Shemarin brothers established a samovar factory in Tula. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Merchant House of the Brothers Shemarin became the largest producer of samovars, second only to the G.C. Bateshev establishment. In 1913 the Shemarins produced about two hundred samovars daily. The other major samovar workshop was that of Teile, established in 1868-70

in Tula. In 1908 the Teile brothers acquired the lease for N. E. Bateshev's samovar factory along with the title "Supplier to the Imperial Court I.G. Bateshev – N.I. Bateshev." This title, however, along with the Imperial Seal, the double-headed eagle, was later removed from the Teile brothers production by a court decision.

Samovars have been produced in a variety of different materials. The most popular have been brass and copper; more expensive are bronze and silver plate. In the twentieth century inexpensive materials of tin and nickel were favored for mass-production. The most highly regarded were *tombak* samovars, which appeared in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This copper alloy consisted of zinc, tin, with copper content between 70-92%. The patina of the prized *tombak* bronze samovar is reminiscent of the color of red gold.

Silver samovars were produced by hand and were most often commissioned by noblemen. These samovars are considered to represent a unique artistic vision, and are accordingly highly valued.

Samovars were manufactured in different styles, shapes, and forms: circular, cylindrical, conical, and wine-glass shapes were most popular among peasants and the working-class. Vase-and tulip-shaped samovars were among more exotic types, custom-made by special order of the patron.

The variety of shapes and materials of samovars can be seen in the examples included in the exhibition. Samovars have played an integral part in Russian cultural history. They represent a part of Russian life daily life (tea-drinking) that was as common to the peasantry as it was to the aristocracy. Samovars are uniquely Russian and as such are highly valued by collectors for both their craftsmanship and aesthetic qualities.

ESSAY BY EDUARD V. KOTLYAROV



RESURRECTION WITH FEASTS
TEMPERA / PANEL 15 x 17"
19th century

The complex arrangement of imagery on this icon was a type seen frequently in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Its central area features a scene of the Resurrection (the most important Feast in Orthodoxy) in which Christ descends into Hell and emerges victorious, bringing with Him Adam (and the rest of humanity). The central panel is surrounded by 16 scenes relating to the great feasts of the Church.



ST. NICHOLAS THE WONDERWORKER
METAL / OIL / WOOD 10 x 8"
19th century

BETWEEN MATTER AND SPIRIT: RUSSIAN ICON PAINTING

MEADOW BROOK ART GALLERY

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